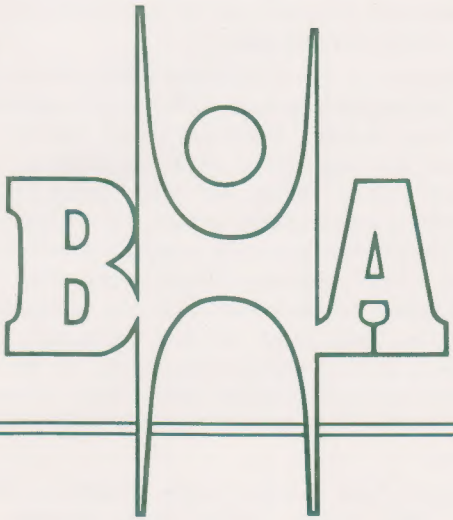
THE WORLD AND YOU

A Humanist Perspective



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THE WORLD AND YOU
A Humanist Perspective

Humanism starts with us as people and the responsibilities of being human. We have the strengths and weakness of our humanity. We are responsible for life on this earth, and its future. Each one of us is rich in potentialities but, in isolation, we are weak. We need the support and reassurance of each other. Together human beings can achieve wonders.

Humanists believe in the effectiveness of human powers. They do not look for guidance to supernatural sources but to our human warmth, intelligence, creativity and concern. Our life with others involves us in a struggle and a search through which we can experience both growth and happiness.

EVOLUTION

Human beings are the outcome of millions of years of evolution. We are related to all life and responsible for all life. The future evolution of this planet is in our hands. to guide us in this task, and in our personal lives, we need values.

Humanists see moral values not as edicts from a god but as the principles upon which good human relationships depend. These are drawn from human nature and experience, as it has evolved. Such values include telling the truth, being honest, accepting responsibility, playing fair, cooperation for the common good and caring for others. These basic human values lie at the heart of societies and civilizations, however much they may be ignored in practice. They must pre-date civilization itself because such principles of relationship are the conditions for social evolution. When these values are not sufficiently respected society begins to fall apart.

Religions have sustained some important values, but their nature makes them divisive and authoritarian, and liable to oppose the emergence of new truth. They are founded on supernatural conceptions, and therefore must appeal to revelation. As there is no "god" to speak, each religion has constructed a different vision. Despite

this, each conceives its own views to be absolute, and enforces it with dogmatic authority. We cannot, then, look to established religions to give the modern world the moral unity that it needs. The best hope for a world-wide morality is to recognise our own humanity within ourselves, and the significance to each of us of other people and the natural world; and our own significance to them. This is the foundation of Humanism.

CHALLENGE

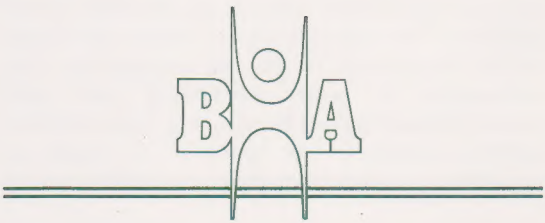
The present is a tremendous challenge to humanity. Our far-reaching scientific and technological discoveries have given us such power and control that we can destroy ourselves and poison the planet. Or we can co-operate to build a beautiful and bountiful world where nature and life are respected and every human being has a chance of personal fulfilment in a stimulating, caring and civilized society.

The difference between the two possible futures is the difference between the greedy exploitation of the world's resources for the benefit of privileged people and nations and the careful development and sharing of the world's resources for the benefit of everyone. There is no future except strife, and possible mutual destruction, for a world in which the present huge gap exists between the have and have-not nations; the wealthy North and the impoverished South.

THE HUMANIST RESPONSE

Humanists, like many others, are profoundly concerned with questions about the meaning and wonder of existence; about the powers and sensitivities of human beings; about birth, death, the vast spectrum of life on earth and the immensities of the universe. But Humanists do not turn to supernatural sources to elucidate these problems. They seek the answers within nature and within themselves. To live life courageously and responsibly is both self-fulfilling and self-transforming. This gives life meaning. In moments of self-transcendence we glimpse a vision of possibilities as yet unattained: possibilities to be

realised through human effort in the natural world.

Homo Sapiens is, in biological time, very young. The giant lizards ruled the planet for 130 million years. We have been the dominant species for only a fraction of that time. We are only beginners and still have a lot to learn. But, in spite of mankind's many weaknesses, and many failures, it could be said that we have made an impressive start! And so, on to the future – our task and our hope. Human beings *can* solve the problems that human beings create.

Humanism is not an armchair philosophy. Humanists believe that life is a challenge to everyone to make whatever contribution he or she can towards building a caring, just society in a caring, just world. It may mean making sacrifices, it may mean changing ourselves, but it is something in which, as responsible human beings, we are inescapably involved. Humanism is a springboard to action.